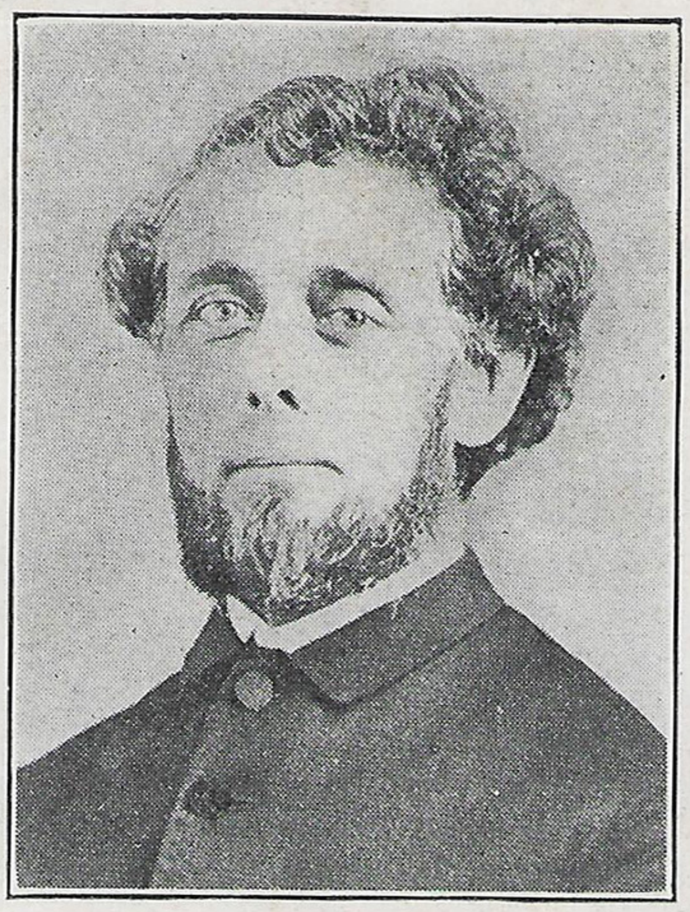
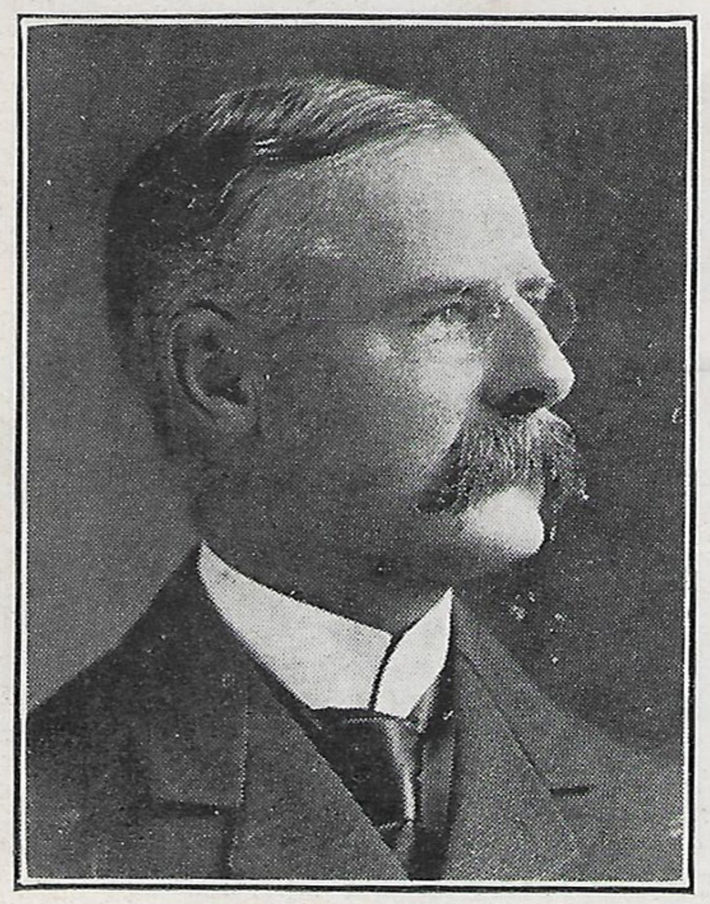
# Moravian Church

## Elizabeth, New Jersey

1866 - 1916



THE REV. CHRISTIAN NEU
1866-1873

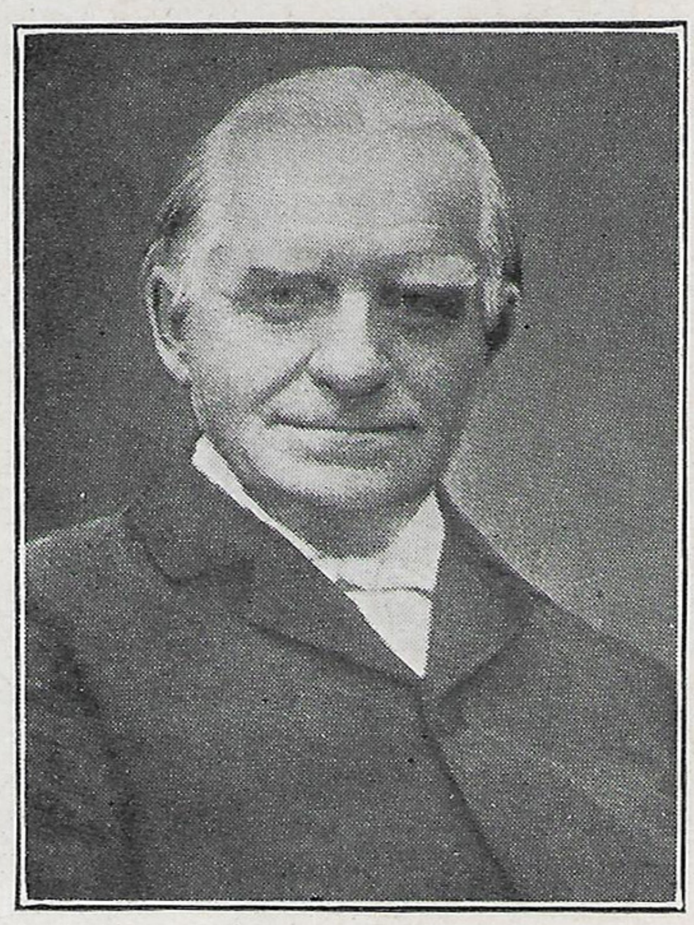


THE REV. CHARLES NAGEL

1873-1876

THE REV. JOHN PRAEGER
1876-1884

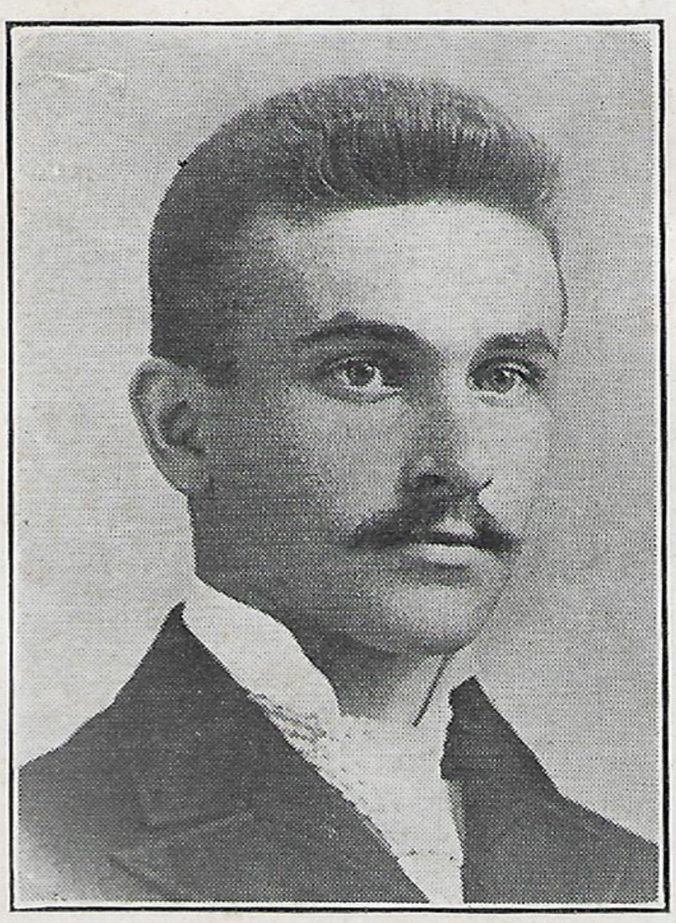
NO PICTURE



THE REV. E. N. SCHWARZE

1884-1892

THE REV. A. E. FRANCKE
SINCE MARCH 5, 1911



THE REV. CLEMENT HOYLER
1892-1896

THE REV. F. R. NITZSCHZE
1898-1911

THE REV. S. H. GAPP
1896-1898

# Historical Sketch

of the

# Moravian Church of Elizabeth, N. J.

Commemorating the

# Fiftieth Anniversary

May 7, 1916

1866-1916

By the Rev. Arthur E. Francke
Pastor since March 5, 1911

# PREFATORY NOTE.

This brief sketch is not prepared for the purpose of giving a detailed account of the life of this congregation. It is merely to serve as a memorial, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of this church, and to bring to the attention of the members and friends the wonderful guidance of our Lord, through all these years of varied activities. It is simply a little reminder: "Lest we forget."

The material was gathered by the writer from former diaries, memorabilia, the records of the Provincial Elders' Conference at Bethlehem, Pa., and reports published in the Moravian, the official church paper of the Moravian Church in America.

A. E. F.

# Historical Sketch of the Moravian Church of Elizabeth, N. J.

1866—1916.

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## Events Leading to the Organization of the Church.

We are accustomed to have history divided into a number of periods, marking distinctly the appearance of a new era. Such a division will be almost impossible, when looking over the events of the past fifty years. The commencement of activities in the new neighborhood about two years ago, is perhaps the only point with which to start a new chapter. As this took place such a short time ago, it will form the closing subject of this sketch.

To begin with the events leading to the founding of the Moravian Church of Elizabeth, N. J., we must go back to the year 1859. At that time the German immigration was directed to Elizabeth in large numbers, and we learn from the records, that a Rev. O. Lohr, a minister of the German Reformed Church, looked after the religious life of these people. During the year 1864, Rev. O. Lohr withdrew from the work, and the people whom he had served were without a shepherd. A man by the name of Hauser, originally a member of the Moravian Church of Germany, seems to have kept the flock together, and induced them to apply to the Moravian Church for a pastor. The request for a local pastor, to organize a Moravian congregation, was received March 4, 1865, by the Provincial Elders' Conference, which is the Executive Board of the Moravian Church. The Rev. M. A. Erdman, of New York, was asked to assume charge of this work in connection with the Second Moravian Church of New York City, of which he was the pastor. The Rev. Erdman could not do justice to his charge and to the Elizabeth work. Fortunately the Rev. Edward Rondthaler, who was then the pastor of the Brooklyn Moravian Church, became deeply interested in this work, and devoted a great deal of his time for the people at Elizabeth. The Rt. Rev. Rondthaler is now the beloved leader of the Southern Province of the Moravian Church, and also the venerable pastor of the congregation at Winston-Salem, N. C.

Through Bro. Rondthaler's efforts on January 5, 1866, the first organization, which was only temporary, took place, and on that day he admitted 36 persons to church fellowship of the Moravian Church of Elizabeth, N. J. In the name of the members, he then expressed to the Provincial Elders' Conference their desire, to have Bro. Christian Neu appointed as their future pastor. Bro. Neu was a layman, the superintendent of the Sunday School of the Second Moravian Church of New York City, and a man sincerely devoted to the work of the Lord's Kingdom. He was well adapted to take up the pastoral duties of this new congregation. Provincial Elders' Conference acceded to this request, and a call was tendered Bro. Neu to become the first pastor of the Moravian Church of Elizabeth, N. J. The call was accepted in due time, and until Bro. Neu's ordination the Rev. Rondthaler and the Rev. Erdman administered the sacraments whenever necessary. The minutes of the officers temporarily elected, and the report of the Rev. Rondthaler, state that the first church council and election of officers took place on April 10, 1866. The first elders elected were Bro. Niemeyer and Bro. Burger. The trustees were the Brethren Breitschwert, H. Miller, H. Gerstung, J. G. Lindner and John Dimler. One of the first trustees is still living, and spends the last years of his life at Westfield, N. J. He is an occasional visitor, and although not belonging to this congregation, still manifests a keen interest in his former church.

It was during the first days of May, 1866, when the first pastor. Bro. Christian Neu, moved from New York to Elizabeth and assumed charge of the work. It may have been the same Sunday on which we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary, fifty years ago, that Bro. Christian Neu was ordained in the Mission Chapel on Martin Street, a minister of the Moravian Church. A large audience, we are told, witnessed the only ordination service ever held in the Moravian Church of Elizabeth.

Another note of interest is, that services had been conducted in Greenville, N. J., and Bro. Neu was in charge of this work. Organization of a congregation took place in the year 1868, but was given up at an early date.

## Incidents Before the Laying of the Cornerstone.

With the Elizabeth church properly organized, and an active pastor as leader, we soon see a great deal of interest aroused, not only among the members of the congregation, but also among their friends. The attention of the other established churches in the city

was turned to this new enterprise, and this fact deserves special mention. The sessions of the Sunday School and church services were conducted in the Mission Chapel on Martin Street, belonging to the First Presbyterian Church of the city. Only a little over a year ago, this property was acquired by the Swedish Lutheran Church. This congregation, for a number of years, was granted the use of the Moravian Church on Seventh Street, for afternoon services, but they now worship in the former Mission Chapel on Martin Street.

The question of erecting a church home soon became of vital interest, as the Sunday School and membership outgrew the chapel. A property at the corner of Centre and Woodruff Streets had been acquired, but it was not deemed wise, to start church activities in that neighborhood. The school house, which stood on this property, may be remembered by some of the members, receiving early training there. A teacher was employed for a number of years, who instructed the children in the German language. This was a period of serious times and difficulties, which often seemed to threaten the welfare of the congregation. Yet through the Lord's guidance the problems were solved, when property was purchased for $1,900.00, at Seventh, Marshall and High Streets, and the old possession was satisfactorily disposed of.

Before an account of the actual building activities is taken up, attention must be drawn to a service of great importance. Among the churches, which were sincerely interested in the progress of this congregation, was St. John's P. E. Church. The Rev. S. A. Clark, rector of St. John's Church, offered his church edifice for a union service, in which all Elizabeth churches united in an effort to draw attention to our work, and solicit financial aid. October 11, 1868, was the day set aside for this service. The church was filled with about 800 people, of all denominations represented in the city. Bishop H. A. Schulz, of Nazareth, Pa., was the first speaker, as a representative of the Moravian Church. He was followed by Bishop Clark, Protestant Episcopal Bishop of Rhode Island, who in most eloquent words urged the assistance for this worthy cause by all churches in the city. The rector of St. John's Church brought this service to a close, asking Bishop Schulz to dismiss the congregation with the benediction. The offering amounted to $350.00. This was not the first time in the history of the Moravian Church, that a Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church and a Moravian Bishop, stood side by side, acknowledging each other as brethren in the great work of the Kingdom of Christ.

# The Consecration of the First Church.

Preparations for the starting of building operations were perfected, so that on April 12, 1869, ground for the first church was broken. Mr. Wm. Mallet was the contractor, who agreed to erect the church for $6,600.00. The builder did not live up to his contract, and this brought the cost of the building to a much larger sum. By Monday, May 17, 1869, the foundation was ready for the laying of the cornerstone. The ceremony took place at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, Bishop H. A. Schulz, of Nazareth, Pa., officiating. The Sunday School and congregation had gathered at the Chapel on Martin Street, and marched in a procession to the building site. Eight ministers from some of the city churches were present, a number of whom took part in the service. The speakers were the Rev. S. A. Clark, rector of St. John's Church; the Rev. Reinhardt of the Presbyterian Church of Elizabethport, the Rev. W. R. Roberts of Westminster Presbyterian Church and the Rev. Guenther of Newark, who spoke in German. A large delegation from the Second Moravian Church of New York City was present at the services of the day. At 7 o'clock in the evening the members and friends assembled for a lovefeast.

During the Summer the work proceeded, while Bro. Neu divided his time between supervising the building and visiting congregations, to secure financial aid. Bro. Neu displayed great skill as a carpenter. The pulpit and communion table, also the inner doors of the church vestibules, were the work of his hands. The communion table, although replaced by another, is still cherished by the members, and occupies a place in the new church, serving as a book table. After examining the carvings on this table, we do not doubt the remark in the diary of Bro. Neu, that his hands and arms ached considerably while at this task.

November 21, 1869, was the day appointed for the consecration of the church. At 9 o'clock in the morning, the congregation met once more in the Mission Chapel, for the purpose of holding a Thanksgiving Service, conducted by Bro. Neu. All seemed to engage in this service with evident emotion. After a farewell to the chapel, the congregation proceeded to the neat little church, the Sunday School leading, while the newly purchased bell called the members to their new church home. The basement was not yet ready for use. The consecration took place at 10:30, Bishop H. A. Schulz preaching the sermon, and the Rev. L. R. Kampman offering the prayer. For the afternoon an English service had been arranged, at which the Rev. E. Kempshall, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, preached the sermon, and the quartet of the Third Presbyterian Church furnished the music. The festal day closed with the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

FIRST CHURCH AND PARSONAGE

COR. SEVENTH AND MARSHALL STS.

Although about one-half of the entire cost of the church had been paid, there still remained a debt of $6,000.00. It was this debt, which in the following years, tested the faith and loyalty of the members.

It may be mentioned here, that the first parsonage was not erected until the Summer of the year 1874, during the pastorate of the Rev. Charles Nagel. The only record of the building operations of the parsonage is found in the treasurer's report. The lumber was bought from a local dealer, and the carpenter work was done by Bro. Wm. Speidel, a member of the church, and president of the board of trustees.

As bright as the outlook for a strong organization appeared to have been, during the first few years of the life of the congregation, several causes seemed to have been a hindrance to the work. Internal strife has never worked to the advantage of any organization, and the lessons of these first years, should unite us more strongly to-day in Christian love and fellowship. Naturally, the large debt on the church did not attract others towards the work of the congregation. When reading through the pages of the diaries, yellow with age, a great deal can be read between the lines. It is a tale of faithful men and women, who indeed had the Lord's work at heart, and who stood loyally by their beloved Moravian Church.

## Sunshine and Shadows.

In following up the growth of the congregation, covering a period of fifty years, we are inclined to observe the leaders. They indeed, were men of great devotion, men of faith and endurance. To-day we can still hear of the ministrations of Bro. Charles Nagel, who came to Elizabeth on February 9, 1873, and served till July, 1876. It was not an easy task for him, to take over a new work with an enormous debt, and through his executive ability the church came out of the first financial entanglement. Bro. and Sister Praeger still linger in the hearts and minds of many of the older members. Of them, it may well be said, that they were true shepherds of the flock, entrusted to their care. Beloved were they, within and without the congregation, and had the spiritual life of the people at heart.

Under the pastorate of the Rev. E. N. Schwarze, who served from 1884 to 1892, no event of importance took place. Quietly the work held its own, with the shadow of the debt still hovering within and without. Faithfully everybody worked to reduce the debt, and it was on May 17, 1894, at the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone of the first church, that Bro. Clement Hoyler, who was then the pastor, announced that the debt was reduced to a little over $2,000.00. The anniversary was not celebrated on a Sunday, but on the exact date, Wednesday, May 17, 1894. Bro. Kluge, representing the Provincial Elders' Conference, was the first speaker. Others who took part in the service were the Brethren Oerter, Rice, Grunert, Gerdsen and Herman, who brought greetings from their churches of New York and vicinity.

From a note in the diary, we learn of the burning down of the brewery, located a short distance from the church property. Unfortunately the brewery rose again. Not on the old site, but, as though it were the greatest friend of the church, took a position just opposite the church property, on Seventh street. This move, it is evident, was detrimental to the activities of the congregation, and eventually brought about the change in location. Various stories in connection with the brewery are afloat, and this one, that the church was actually known among some people, as the "Brewery Church," should be mentioned. Bro. Hoyler was followed in the pastorate by the Rev. S. H. Gapp, of whom the Elizabeth Journal said, that he was "the youngest pastor in the city." But, nevertheless, even through his short pastorate, the city had many opportunities to take notice of him. Apparently, while the shadow of the debt disappeared, the brightness of the "Rising Sun" brewery, opposite the church on Seventh street, could not cast off the gloom hovering over the work. Strangers seldom came to attend the services, and only the faithfulness of the members kept up the work.

Bro. F. R. Nitzschke was the successor of Bro. Gapp, serving from November, 1898, to February, 1911. It was another period of watchful waiting, which called for a strong faith in God, in order to be able to endure the stress and discouragements of the work. Yet, it seemed as though the dawn of a brighter future was breaking. It was on Friday evening, December 28, 1900, when the congregation met for a Thanksgiving Service. This service was specially arranged, to celebrate the cancelling of the last part of the debt, which had rested on the church for a period of thirty years. No doubt, there are still many, who remember this occasion, and also the efforts put forth by members and friends. Eighty-nine shares had been issued and sold, thus making it possible to pay off the last debt of $890.00. The pastor had called on many of the congregations in the district for financial aid, and their liberal response amounted to about $500.00. This, with the money raised by the congregation, brought about the liquidation of the debt. A special program had been printed for the occasion. The Rev. J. T. Hamilton, a member of P. E. C., delivered the address. The former pastors had also kindly responded to an invitation to share the joy of this celebration. From the program we note, that the Rev. C. Nagel, the Rev. E. N. Schwarze and the Rev. S. H. Gapp took part in the thanksgiving service.

The property committee was called into existence by church council in July, 1904. The first committee consisted of three members, Bro. D. Israel, Bro. M. Wolferz and Bro. H. P. Ernst. The membership was increased in the succeeding years, until it reached the number of the present committee. The first step forward for this committee was, to take in hand the sale of the old property, and to find ways and means of securing a new location. Through the efforts of this committee, a lot at the corner of Reid and Lafayette streets, was proposed as the site for a new location. It was impossible for the committee, to secure from the agent a figure within reach of the congregation, and it seemed as if negotiations were of no avail, when, through the assistance of Mr. Stafford, the lot, 100x125, was bought. The price of this property was $1,775.00, which was paid by making a loan from the Board of Church Extension. The deed was handed to the board of trustees in October of the year 1905. The large chart, which displayed the new property, is still in our minds, as we remember it hanging on the wall behind the choir, in the old church.

The events leading to the erection of the new parsonage, started with action taken by church council on September 15, 1909. Circumstances made it absolutely necessary, that another house be rented, or a new building erected. The Board of Church Extension offered to pay $100.00 annually towards interest, until disposal of the old

property could be made. After careful consideration of the proposition, it was unanimously decided to erect a new parsonage on Reid Street. Thus, Mr. J. Wind, Jr., a local architect, was engaged, and on December 7, 1910, the contract was given to Mr. Klove to erect the parsonage for $4,250.00. A loan was made from the Harmonia Mutual Savings Fund, and a mortgage of that amount is still resting

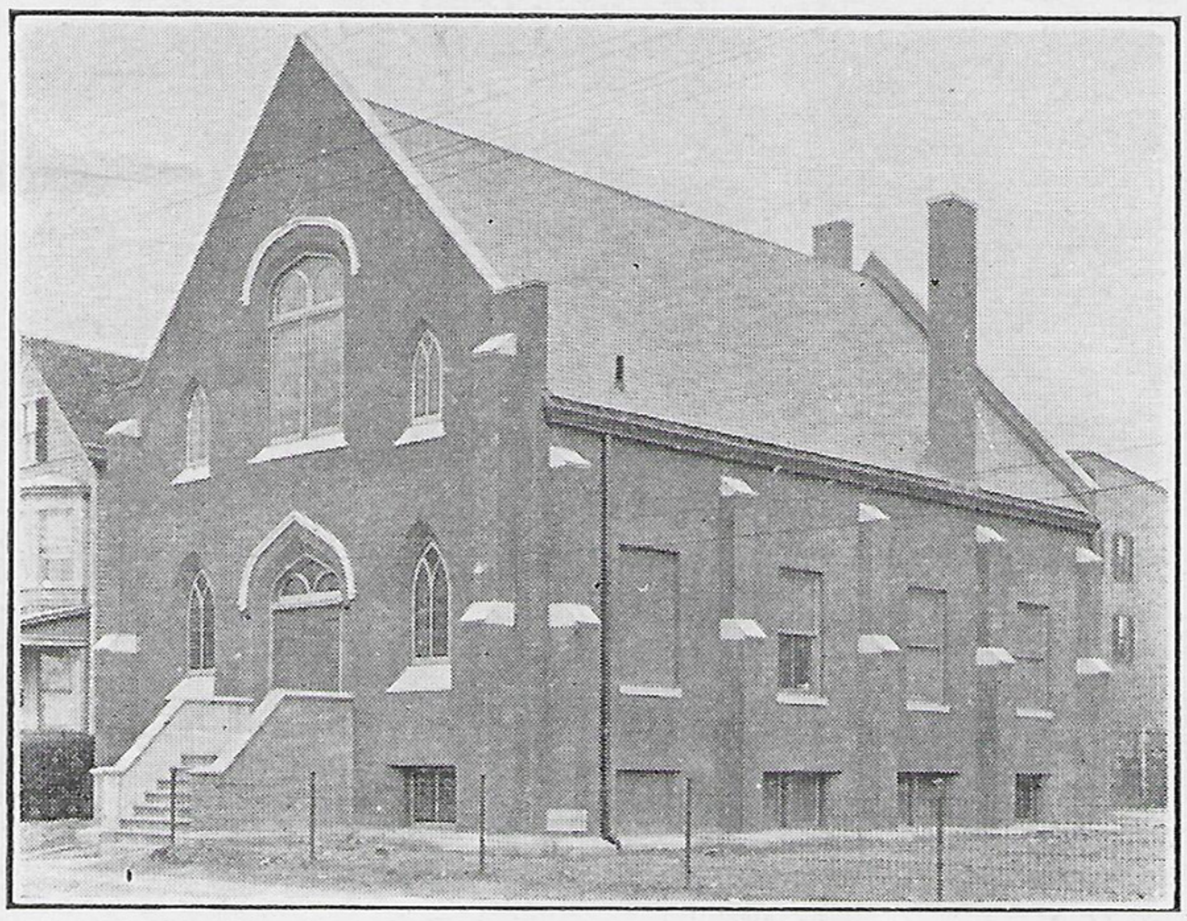
THE PARSONAGE
156 Reid Street

on the new house. Bro. Nitzschke and his family did not have the pleasure of living in the new parsonage very long. The new home was occupied by them in June, 1910, and in February, 1911, a change in the pastorate was made. Bro. Nitzschke received a call to Castelton Corners, S. I., preaching his farewell sermon on February 26. The present pastor was introduced to the congregation on March 5, 1911, by Bishop M. W. Leibert.

## The Transfer of Church Activity.

After a complete survey of conditions, it was deemed urgent, that church activity be commenced at once in the new neighborhood. That the residence of the pastor was on the new field, did not prove to be sufficient. This matter was taken up seriously at the July church council, suggesting, that steps should be taken towards the erection of some church building in the new location. Mr. Theodore Schwarze, of South Orange, kindly gave the first sketches for a suitable building, and later on Mr. Louis Quien, Jr., was engaged as architect. Permission had been received by the Provincial Elders' Conference, to collect in the province for the Elizabeth church. In February, 1912, the present pastor set out on his collecting trip,

visiting first the Eastern congregations, and leaving in August for a longer stay, to canvass the Western district. The writer returned towards the end of November. During his absence the Rev. F. Zeller, of Bloomfield, N. J., attended very acceptably to the Sunday services. Plans were carefully worked out, and gradually reduced to the present dimensions. Bids were secured several times, and



THE FIRST PART OF THE PRESENT CHURCH
COR. REID AND LAFAYETTE STREETS

only when the writer personally requested figures from the contractors, was it possible to accept the bids. The property committee met on May 28, 1913, to consider propositions to be submitted to church council, which was announced for June 2. After favorable action by church council, the contracts were signed June 10, 1913, the total cost of the chapel of the church to be $10,760.00. The architect furnished plans for the entire edifice, and the cut will show its appearance when completed. Our finances permitted only the erection of the chapel for the present. Work was started early in July, and the cornerstone was laid on Sunday, August 17, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. It was a very hot day, nevertheless a large audience had gathered. Bishop Moench, of Bethlehem, Pa., preached the sermon, and addresses were made by visiting pastors from New York and Staten Island. The documents were read and placed in the copper box, then Bishop Moench officially laid the cornerstone, the Rev. John Romig offering prayer. While the building was being erected the writer, who had gone to Utica, N. Y., to solicit financial aid over Sunday, had to spend six eventful weeks in the Faxton Hospital, undergoing an operation, but on his return was able to supervise the completion of the building.

Coming as a stranger into the old church, the thought arose, that it would not be hard to leave this building for another, more attractive. Yet, when the day for actual parting came, heavy hearts and eyes filled with tears could be found. For many were the associations connected with these sacred walls. Here, our fathers and mothers taught us to worship and to pray. Here, we attended Sunday School, and above all, here, we made our confession of faith, and gathered around the Lord's table. A solemn service of "Farewell" was conducted on December 28, 1913, Bishop M. W. Leibert, D. D., of New York City, addressing us.

Although the chapel was not quite ready, we had to arrange for the consecration services for January 4, 1914. Hardly do we need to review these memorable days. The opening services were conducted on the Sundays during the month of January. Bishop Moench consecrated the chapel on the 4th of January, at the morning service. and preached again in the evening. The following Sunday, we welcomed the Rev. Paul de Schweinitz, D. D., in our midst. On the remaining Sundays the Rev. S. H. Gapp, Ph. D., and the Rev. E. S. Hagen addressed large audiences.

Since that day, we can truly say that the Lord has blessed us abundantly. The Sunday School has more than doubled its membership, and the attendance at divine services is very encouraging. Palm Sunday, 1914, lingers still in our minds, as we were privileged to welcome a large number into the fellowship of this congregation.

The societies have played an important part in connection with the life of the church. The oldest of these is the Ladies' Aid Society, organized under the first pastor, the Rev. C. Neu, on February 23, 1868. This society has been in many respects, the burden bearer of the church, and deserves the consideration and support of all ladies in the church. The forty-fifth anniversary of the society was celebrated February 23, 1913, and just a few more years, the half century mark will be passed. The Ladies' Auxiliary was formerly known as the Mission Circle, and organized as the Young Ladies' Society. This is the second oldest organization in the congregation. Through the efforts of Mrs. John Praeger, the wife of the Rev. Praeger, on October 23, 1876, this society was started with five charter members. While the Rev. C. Hoyler was pastor, the young people attended a conference of Christian Endeavor societies at Edgewater, S. I. Through the inspiration received at this conference, they organized a Christian Endeavor society on their way home, in the waiting room at Concord, S. I., on November 18, 1892. The boys and girls met for the first time April 9, 1893, and on May 14, of the same year, the Junior Christian Endeavor Society was regularly organized. The Men's Association is the outcome of the

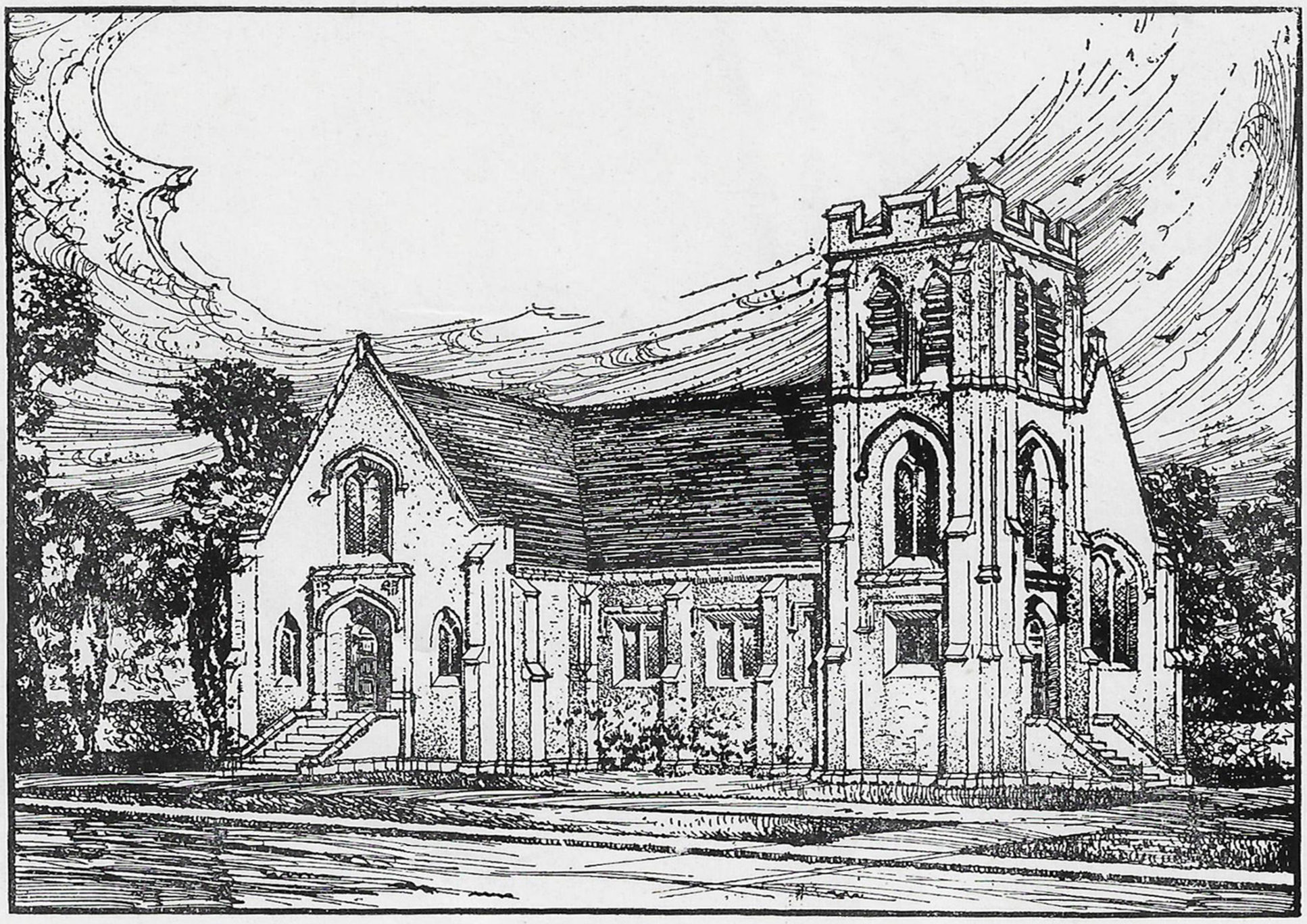
Men's League. The men assembled for a meeting on February 18, 1909, and organized on the 25th of the month.

Thus the work has been growing gradually, and as we are celebrating the fiftieth anniversary on May 7th, 1916, we will give God the glory, and consecrate ourselves anew to Christ, pledging to Him an unselfish and willing service. May 7 seems to be a very appropriate time to celebrate this anniversary. April 10, 1866, the first church council and election of officers took place. Bro. Neu moved to Elizabeth in the beginning of May of the same year, thus becoming the first local pastor. May 17, 1869, witnessed the laying of the cornerstone of the first church. All these events seem to center our interest about this time of the year.

The congregation now enjoys a comfortable little church home. It is hoped, that in the not distant future, this building may serve only for what it is intended, the Sunday School and social activities of the church. At the present time the basement is used for the sessions of the Sunday School. Church services are held in the auditorium on the main floor, where also a modern stage serves as pulpit platform and meeting place for the primary department of the Sunday School. The parlors on the second floor are in great demand for social gatherings, as well as for class rooms on Sundays.

The review of the first half century of our church life, will have served its purpose, if greater faith, deeper love and unreserved trust in God's guidance, will unite members and friends for service in the coming years. The greatest gift the Lord may send us for our anniversary, is a vision of far reaching and uplifting, but above all, soulsaving activities, in the completed edifice. Let with this vision be combined the willingness to work for the Master, until our goal is reached.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."



SKETCH OF NEW CHURCH WHEN COMPLETED